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Transcultural Journal for Humanities & Social Sciences (TJHSS)

Prof. Hussein Mahmoud

BUC, Cairo, Egypt

Email: hussein.hamouda@buc.edu.eg

Editor-in-Chief

Prof. Fatma Taher

BUC, Cairo, Egypt

Email: fatma.taher@buc.edu.eg

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Email: giuseppe.cecere3@unibo.it

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Email: wiese@uni-marburg.de,

wiese.richard@gmail.com

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BUC, Cairo, Egypt

Email: nehad.mohamed@buc.edu.eg

Managing Editors

Prof. Mohammad Shaaban Deyab

BUC, Cairo, Egypt

Email: Mohamed-diab@buc.edu.eg

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Prof. Dr. Herbert Zeman
Neuere deutsche Literatur
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Universitätsring 1
1010 Wien
E-Mail:
herbert.zeman@univie.ac.at

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University of Hildesheim/
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Email: montanar@uni-hildesheim.de,
elke.montanari@uni-hildesheim.de

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Email:
manar.moez@buc.edu.eg

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Universidad Complutense
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Email: isabelhg@ucm.es

Elena Gómez
Universidad Europea de
Madrid, Spain
Email: elena.gomez@universidadeuropea.es
Universidad de Alicante,
Spain
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Universidad Autónoma de
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Email: el-madkouri@uam.es

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Universidad Complutense
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Email: mccazorl@filol.ucm.es

Prof. Lin Fengmin
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Arabic Language
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institute of Eastern
Literatures studies
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Email: emirlin@pku.edu.cn

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Tongji University
Email: 98078@tongji.edu.
cn

Prof. Wang Genming
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Arab Studies
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University
Email: genmingwang@xisu.cn

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Dean of post graduate
institute
Beijing language
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Email: zhanghua@bluc.edu.cn

Prof. Belal Abdelhadi
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Lebanon university
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**Prof. Jan Ebrahim
Badawy**
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Literature
Faculty of Alsun, Ain
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Email:
janeraon@hotmail.com

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Ebrahim**

Professor of Chinese
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Faculty of Alsun, Ain
Shams University
Email: ninette_b86@yahoo.com

Prof. Galal Abou Zeid

Professor of Arabic
Literature
Faculty of Alsun, Ain
Shams University
Email:
gaalswn@gmail.com

Prof. Tamer Lokman

Associate Professor of
English
Taibah University, KSA
Email:
tamerlokman@gmail.com

Prof. Hashim Noor

Professor of Applied
Linguistics
Taibah University, KSA
Email:
prof.noor@live.com

Prof Alaa Alghamdi

Professor of English
Literature
Taibah University, KSA
Email:
alaaghamdi@yahoo.com

Prof. Rasha Kamal

Associate Professor of
Chinese Language
Faculty of Alsun, Ain
Shams University. Egypt
Email:
rasha.kamal@buc.edu.eg

**Professor M.
Safeieddeen Kharbosh**

Professor of Political
Science
Dean of the School of
Political Science and
International Relations
Badr University in Cairo
Email:
muhammad.safeieddeen@buc.edu.eg

Professor Ahmad Zayed

Professor of Sociology
Dean of the School of
Humanities & Social
Sciences
Badr University in Cairo
Email: ahmed-abdallah@buc.edu.eg

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Appraising External Influences On Ijesa Culture In Southwestern Nigeria Before 1990

Olayemi Jacob Ogunniyi

Department of History

Faculty of Arts

University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Oyo-State, Nigeria

Email: ayoyemlove@yahoo.com

Abstract: The major thrust of this paper is to appraise how external contact influences culture of Ijesa people in Southwestern Nigeria before 1990. To a very large extent, Ijesaland has a long history of existence, notwithstanding, Ijesa people had undergone several political, cultural and social transformations over the centuries which no doubt, had affected its history. On the whole, the paper argues that at different times, Ijesa was under the suzerainty of Oyo and Bini; at a time, it was an independent nation. However, the most significant era in Ijesa history was the 19th century-when several contending powers came onto the political scene in Yorubaland. The spread of Christianity and Islam in Ijesaland was like burning grassland during harmattan. Some factors responsible for these were the humanitarian gestures and spiritual assistance being rendered by the early Muslim clerics to their new converts. The paper adopts the descriptive and analytical method of historical reconstruction as the framework of analysis by expressing that most researchers and historians of Yoruba/West African cultures agree on the overall that slavery, colonialism and missionary activities changed the cultural life of the peoples inhabiting the Western shores of Africa. The impact continues to be felt over a period of time in many different ways. Arguably not all of it is negative. It concludes that when viewed from the point of view of cultural practices, tradition, virtues, societal values and ethos, gender differentiation, marriage and marriage customs, European culture has negatively impacted Ijesa culture.

Keywords: Ijesa people, Cultural, Political, Yorubaland, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

The Yoruba are one of the largest African ethnic groups south of the Sahara Desert. They are, in fact, not a single group, but rather a collection of diverse people bound together by a common language, history, and culture. The Yoruba homeland is located in West Africa. It stretches from a savannah (grassland) region in the north to a region of tropical rain forests in the south. Most Yoruba live in Nigeria. However there are also some scattered groups in Benin Republic and Togo, neighbouring countries to the west of Nigeria (Molefi, 2006, p.89). Within Nigeria, the Yoruba dominate the western part of the country. Yoruba mythology holds that all Yoruba people descended from Odua or Oduduwa. During the four centuries of the slave trade, Yoruba territory was known as the Slave Coast. Uncounted numbers of Yoruba were carried to the Americas. Their descendants preserved Yoruba traditions. In several parts of the Caribbean and South America, Yoruba religion has been combined with Christianity. In 1893, the Yoruba kingdoms in Nigeria became part of the Protectorate of Great Britain. Until 1960 Nigeria was a British colony and the Yoruba were British subjects. On October 1, 1960, Nigeria became an independent nation structured as a federation of states. The Yoruba language belongs to the Congo-Kordofanian language family. Yoruba has many dialects, but its speakers can all understand each other. Yoruba is a tonal language.

It is apposite to state that the Ijesa people constitute one of the finest and virile groups of the Yoruba people and the focus of this study. Ijesaland is located in the forest zone of

Nigeria but adjacent to the Savannah; it lies in an area with a rich history of ancient human settlement. Most of Ijesaland today is bounded by Ife and Osogbo to the West, Ondo area to the South, Ekiti to the East and the Igbomina area to the North. Much of Ijesaland lies around the upper reaches of the Rivers Oni, Sasa and Osun. Ijesa country sits on land rising from about 800 ft in the forests along the Oni valley to about 1700ft in the hills around Imesi Ile to the North and close to about 2,000 ft in the Eastern boundaries with Ekiti State. The typical soil is largely red laterite with heavy rainfall during the rainy season which lasts from late March to early November (Fawole, 1993, p.3). It lies on Latitude 8.92°N Longitude 3.42°E.

Ilesa lies in the Yoruba Hills and at the intersection of roads from Ile-Ife, Osogbo, and Akure. Ilesa is a city located in the western part of Nigeria; it is also the name of a historic state centered around that city. The state was ruled by a monarch bearing the title of Owa Obokun Adimula of Ijesaland. The state of Ijesaland consists of Ilesha itself and a number of surrounding towns and villages. The Ijesas, a term also denoting the people of the state of Ijesaland, are part of the present Osun State of Nigeria. Some of the popular towns of the Ijesas are Osu, Ijebu-Ijesa, Ipetu-Ijesa, Iperindo, Iwoye-Ijesa, Ibokun, Erin Ijesa, Esa Oke, Ipole, Ifewara, Iwara, Erinmo, Iwaraja, Idominasi, Ilase, Igangan, Imo, Imesi-Ile, Ikeji-Ile, Esa-Odo, Kajola, Otan-Ile, Owena-Ijesa, etc. There are in fact not less than 200 towns and villages in Ijesaland (Fawole, 1993, p.4). Ilesa which was founded in the sixteenth century emerged as the modern center of power in Ijesaland outstripping ancient centers at Ibokun, Ipole and Ijebu Ijesa (Peel, 1983).

i. GEOGRAPHICAL DESCRIPTION OF IJESALAND

Ijesaland is bounded by Ife, Osogbo and Ondo area to the South, Ekiti to the East, Oyo and Ibolu to the West and the Igbomina area to the North. Much of Ijesaland lies around the upper reaches of the Rivers Oni, Sasa and Osun. Ijesa country sits on land rising from about 800 ft in the forests along the Oni valley to about 1700ft in the hills around Imesi Ile to the North and close to about 2,000 ft in the Eastern boundaries with Ekiti State. The typical soil is largely red laterite with heavy rainfall during the rainy season which lasts from late March to early November (Micheal, 1948). It lies on Latitude 8.92°N Longitude 3.42°E. Ilesa lies in the Yoruba Hills and at the intersection of roads from Ile-Ife, Osogbo, and Akure. Ilesa is a city located in the western part of Nigeria; it is also the name of a historic state centered around that city. The state of Ijesaland consists of Ilesha itself and a number of surrounding towns and villages. The Ijesas, a term also denoting the people of the state of Ijesaland, are part of the present Osun State of Nigeria. Some of the popular towns of the Ijesas are Osu, Ijebu-Ijesa, Ipetu-Ijesa, Iperindo, Iwoye-Ijesa, Ibokun, Erin Ijesa, Esa Oke, Ipole, Ifewara, Iwara, Erinmo, Iwaraja, Idominasi, Ilase, Igangan, Imo, Imesi-Ile, Ikeji-Ile, Esa-Odo, Kajola, Otan-Ile, Owena-Ijesa, etc. There are in fact not less than 200 towns and villages in Ijesaland (Fawole, 1993).

Map of Ijesaland

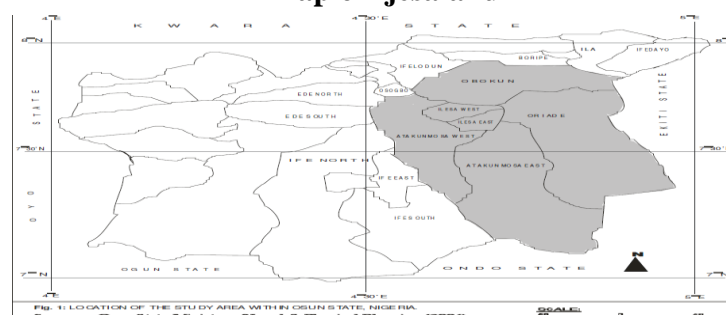


FIG. 1: LOCATION OF THE STUDY AREA WITHIN OSUN STATE, NIGERIA.

Source: Osun State Ministry of Land & Physical Planning (2006)

Rise and Growth of Islam in Ijesaland

Although the actual date of the introduction of Islam to the Yoruba speaking people of south western Nigeria is not known, it is believed that the Muslim empires in West Africa knew of Yorubaland long before its introduction to Islam. The scholars Balogun, Nasiru and Al-Iluri have asserted that Islam had spread in the land long before the jihad of Shaykh cUthman Dan Fodiyo in 1804 C.E. (Nasiru, 1977; Balogun, 1998, p.10, Abdullah, 1990) Al-Iluri in his book *Al-Islam fi Najiriyyah*, traces the emergence of Islam in Yorubaland to the time of Mansa Musa of Mali Empire in the 13th century (Abdullah, 1978, p.33) As an example, the name Esin Imale, which is popularly referred to in Yorubaland as meaning ‘the religion of the Mali people’ Danmole discovered in his research that some Muslims in Oke Imale, an area of Ilorin, claimed that their ancestors came from Mali to settle in the city. He however doubted the authenticity of the claim, as it could not be determined that these Ilorin Muslims were descendants of the Wangara lineages, who traced their origin to Old Mali (Danmole, 1981, p.5).

The spread of Islam in Yorubaland prior to Uthmān Dan Fodiyo’s jihad was slow although the occupation of Ilorin by the jihadists helped in the rapid spread of the religion to many towns in the land. While Ilorin became an important Islamic centre, the jihadists used the opportunity to launch several attacks on some neighbouring towns and villages. According to Al-Aluri, the first Mosque was built in Oyo-Ile in 1550 A.D. although, there were no Yoruba Muslims, the Mosque only served the spiritual needs of foreign Muslims living in Oyo. Progressively, Islam came to Yoruba land, and muslims started building Mosques: Iwo town led, its first Mosque built in 1655 followed by Işeyin, in 1760; Lagos, 1774; Şaki, 1790; and Oşogbo, 1889. In time, Islam spread to other towns like Oyo (the first Oyo convert was Solagberu), Ibadan, Abeokuta, Ijebu-Ode, Ikirun, and Ede before the 18th century Sokoto jihad.

The spread of Islam within Ijesaland is closely connected with the Ilorin people. Paakoyi, who was regarded as the father of Islam in Osogbo, was a trader and as a result of his trade contacts with the Ilorin people converted to Islam. He introduced the religion to Osogbo during the reign of Oba Dabira Alomilagba in the latter part of the 18th century. Among the early converts was Alfa Salahudeen, who after embracing Islam travelled to Ilorin to learn more about the religion. On his return, he became the first Imam of Osogbo and of the first mosque that was built at Idi Ako. However, Islam became more popular during the reigns of Oba Fabode (1870-71) and Oba Bamgbola (1891-93) when various socio- religious organizations like Egbe Alasalatu and Egbe Binukonu were formed (Gbadamosi, 1978, pp.53-54). Islam was said to have reached Ibokun, a tributary town of Ilorin before the Osogbo war in the 1840s. However, it was after the defeat of the Fulani Jihadists by the Ibadans at the battle of Osogbo in 1843, that Kusi, an Ilorin native of Ibokun escaped back to his hometown (Johnson, 1976, p.289). The introduction of Islam to Ile-Ife, the ancestral home of Yorubaland, was not easy. An apt description of this is given by Akintola, who writes: Looking for Islam in Ife was like looking for a needle in a haystack. They stuck to tradition as if they were glued to it. They proved formidably stubborn. Preaching Islam on the streets even proved dangerous and a house-to-house method of propagation had to be adopted (Akintola, 1981, p.156).

Ile-Ife, to the Yorubas, is more than just their ancestral home. The town is believed to have been the sacred place where the work of creation began and hosted virtually all the semi-divinities which were taken by each Yoruba town to its respective new settlement. Due to the town’s position and its devotion to paganism, the Muslim preachers experienced

various difficulties in converting the town people to Islam. However, when the Modakekes arrived as refugees in the area around 1909, the religion gradually established itself further in the town. The Modakekes, who had embraced Islam before they settled in the area, started accepting Muslims from Ilorin and Nupeland in their new settlement and before long the establishment of Islam was well underway.

Several factors contributed to the rise of Islam in Yoruba land by mid-19th century. Before the decline of Oyo, several towns around it had large Muslim communities, unfortunately, when Oyo was destroyed, these Muslims (Yoruba and immigrants) relocated to newly formed towns and villages and became Islam protagonists. Second, there was a mass movement of people at this time into Yorubaland; many of these immigrants were Muslims who introduced Islam to their host. In the Ijesaland area, Seedu Ogun, of the Okesa area of Ilesa, was said to have introduced Islam to the area around 1860. Ogun was said to have embraced Islam while sojourning in Ilorin before coming back to his hometown to preach the religion. He later invited Alfa Parakoyi, a native of Ilorin, to Ilesa for the purpose of preaching Islam in the area (Gbadamosi, p.86). Alfa Muhammad Bello, Abu Bakr Abdus-Salam and Ayuba Tijani were said to have travelled from Ilorin to Ijesaland. Initially, these mallams practiced their religion privately, but after spending some years in Ijesaland, decided to publicise their religion by inviting people to join them and an elementary Arabic school was established for the children of the new converts as well as for any adults.

The spread of Islam in Ijesaland was like burning grassland during harmattan. Some factors responsible for this were the humanitarian gestures and spiritual assistance being rendered by the early Muslim clerics to their new converts. The Islamic stance on the 'institution of polygamy' was favourable to the people who saw it as liberal and almost on par with their traditions. Despite the fact that the people lived unrestricted polygamous lives, Islam allowed its adherents to marry up to four wives, provided they could meet their moral and physical obligations. Thus, those people who had more than one wife before embracing Islam did not consider themselves as having broken any laws and experienced no discomfort in accepting the new religion. The 'obas' of many Ijesa towns also contributed to the Islamisation process and their roles can be appreciated in the following ways:

- i. The invitation and hosting of Muslim clerics. One characteristic of Islam in Africa is the recognition of Muslim clerics as custodians of powerful and effective charms and amulets, and the use of them in their consultations to cure people's physical and spiritual maladies. The engagement of the occult experts by traditional rulers in Yorubaland served as great momentum for the spread of Islam in the domain. The continual outbreak of epidemics and wars in various Ijesa towns prompted many traditional rulers to invite the Muslim clerics to their towns to solve their problems.
- ii. Acceptance of Islam. The acceptance of Islam by some chiefs influenced many people to embrace Islam within their domains.
- iii. Marriage relationship. Some Ijesa chiefs who accepted Islam tried to consolidate their relationship with the Muslim clerics by allowing the clerics to marry their daughters and they even married Muslim women themselves. The remarkable progress of Islam was witnessed in Irogun Ijesa when the chief of the town, for the first time in the history of the town brought an Ilorin woman to the palace. The king out of love for the woman gave her freedom to go to Olori- Awo's compound to congregate with other Muslims for the purpose of observing the daily prayers. This woman is said to have given birth to Folayanka Atobatele, who in 1909 became the Orangun of Ila.
- iv. Pursuance of Islamic Education. Research does not reveal that any traditional ruler in Osun State pursued an Islamic education after accepting Islam. However, some rulers

respected their mallams by releasing their wards to them for the purpose of learning the Qur'an. The efficacy of the prayer offered through its recitation might have been responsible for this patronage.

v. Allocation of Land for construction of Mosques. Whether they embraced Islam or not, most of the owa obokuns were instrumental in the allocation of land in their towns for the construction of mosques. It can be observed that almost all the most important mosques in the Ijesaland were located close to the king's palaces and their respective town markets and this is clearly evident in Ilesa. For instance, in 1875, Prince Abu Bakare Orimogunje, who was a relative of Oba Owa Ajimoko Haastrup, helped in constructing the first central mosque in Ilesa (Adeleye, 1988).

Islam, like Christianity also found a common ground with the Ijesa people that believed in Supreme Being, while there were some areas of disagreements, Islamic teachers impressed upon their audience the need to change from worshipping idols and embrace Allah. Without delay, Islamic scholars and local Imams started establishing Koranic centers to teach Arabic and Islamic studies, much later, conventional schools were established to educate new converts and to propagate Islam. Islamic religion no doubt, impacted Ijesa culture significantly. Ifa (oracle) consultation is Islamized to Istikhara (inquires prayer). Celebration of oriṣa festival is transformed or replaced with celebrating eid-el-fitrī and eid-el-kabir. Women and men outlook was modified as polygamy is curtailed or modified into "four at a time" while prefixed oriṣa names were changed to "Olu" (Ọlọrun) plus Bunmi, became Ọlọrunbunmi. Traditional shrines and ritual sites were replaced with Central Mosques in Ijesaland.

ii. Origin and Expansion of Christianity in Ijesaland

The abolition of slavery led to the evacuation and re-settlement of ex-slaves in Sierra-Leone. It is necessary to mention that some slaves did not have the European experience because their ships were intercepted on the highways and diverted to Sierra-Leone by the anti-slavery squad. A section of the Yoruba ex-slaves in Sierra-Leone were known as Aku. Aku was a term of salutation and greeting common amongst the Oyo people of Western Nigeria. Another set of Yoruba ex-slaves in Sierra-Leone were called Lucumi, translated as Olukumi (Omotoye, 2003, p.173). These were people from Ijesa and Ekiti districts. The two Yoruba groups were identified through their dialects and intonations. The Christian missionaries seized the opportunity of these ex-slaves who belonged to the two worlds of Europe and Africa to propagate the gospel. Many of them had become Christians, educated and were interested in going back home. However, we should note that they had become "hybrids;" they had imbibed the Christian religion as against African traditional religion. They saw the European culture and religion as superior to African culture. They could speak the white man's language –English. Some of them were opportuned to attend Fourah Bay College, Sierra-Leone, which was the first western institution of learning in West Africa.

A major factor that contributed to the survival and growth of Christianity in Yorubaland was the use of Yoruba language in the spread of the gospel (Omotoye, 2003). The ex-slaves became intermediaries between the converts and the missionaries. Coupled with this was the translation of English Bible to Yoruba by Bishop Samuel Ajayi Crowther. It gave the Christian converts the opportunity of reading the Bible in their native language. It is necessary to mention that Ajayi Crowther was assisted in the translation assignment by other missionaries such as Thomas King, J.S. Schon, Charles Gollmer, David Hinderer, D.O. Williams and Adolphus Mann (Omotoye, 2003). Some ex-slaves from Sierra-Leone came to Nigeria and invited Christian missionaries to preach to them and their communities.

It is necessary to note that the attitudes of traditional rulers to the missionaries in Yorubaland could be categorized into two: The first group were those who welcomed the missionaries; while the second groups were those that refused to embrace them. The traditional chiefs that welcomed the missionaries did so not necessarily because of their convictions to be Christians but because of some other factors such as political, social and economic. On the other hand, the second group of traditional rulers was suspicious of the white men. It was feared that the white missionaries might disturb and devalue their tradition and sovereignty and appropriate their land. According to E.A. Ayandele, the traditional rulers believed that the white missionaries belonged to the world of spirits because of their skin, which was white and so were thought to be unnatural (Ayandele, 1984). For example, the Ijebu were disturbed by the mere sight of James White of CMS mission. In order to appease the gods, goats, sheep and fowls were sacrificed for allowing white people to move about in their land. It was reported that the Awujale, the traditional ruler, refused to shake hands with him. The traditional people believed that any community that allowed the white man to settle would suffer destruction from the wrath of the gods of the land. Apart from this factor, many communities in Yorubaland were already enjoying a high sense of tranquility, peace and orderliness before the coming of the white man. They believed that if they were allowed to stay in their communities, their independence and sovereignty would be lost. It was believed that, all social laws and traditional institutions would break down, and as a matter of course, sovereignty would disappear before British customs and rules. The Ijebu people valued and treasured their traditional values and institutions so they did not want any external intervention.

It was from Abeokuta that other Christian missionaries started moving to other towns in Yorubaland. David Hinderer an Anglican cleric was sent to Ibadan in 1851. Thus, he became the first white Missionary in the community. He and his wife Hannah contributed significantly to the religious, political and educational development of Ibadan. He consequently sent some missionaries to Ile-Ife, Modakeke, Ilesa, and Ondo. For instance, Mr. Williams was sent to Modakeke, Henry Thomas to Ile-Ife, Green to Osogbo, G. A. Vincent to Ilesa and Charles Phillips to Ondo (Omotoye, 2003). The latter became a superintendent of the CMS mission in eastern Yorubaland.

The Methodist mission equally sent some missionaries to other parts of Yorubaland such as Lagos, Oyo, Ibadan and Ilesa before the end of the 19th century. For instance, Ademuyiwa Haastrup, a native of Ilesa, a class teacher and a local preacher played a prominent role in the evangelization of Ijesaland (N.A.I.Oyo Prof.). Other Methodist missionaries were Rev. Henry J. Ellis, J. Bond and W. J. Overs, Rev. T. E. Williams and Williams Hoad. Oliver Griffin worked assiduously in Oyo and Ilesa. He got the help of Fredrick Kamokun, Adedeji Haastrup Ajimoko who later became the Owa of Ilesa. The Catholic Mission also came to Yorubaland before the end of the 19th century. Father Borghero landed in Lagos on the 8th September, 1863. He was fortunate to meet some ex-slaves who had become Christians in Lagos. He visited Ikorodu, Epe, Ijebu and Abeokuta. Father Theodore Holley, another missionary, was recognized as the pioneer of missionary work in Abeokuta. He was in Oyo in 1884. Several attempts were made to establish a Catholic Mission in Ibadan which was not successful. However, in 1894, Father Paul Pellet and Father Joseph Pied succeeded in the establishment of a mission there. The Catholic missionaries eventually sent some missionaries from Ibadan to Ilesa, Ondo, and other Ekiti towns and villages (Omotoye, 2005).

The peace moves by Christian Missionaries and British Intervention in Ekitiparapo/Ibadan War of the 19th century must be highlighted at this juncture. Peace

initiatives came from four main quarters: the indigenous powers in the hinterland, the modern educated in Lagos, the Missionaries and the Lagos colonial government. Frantic and consistent efforts were made in finding an amicable solution to the war. The activities of the Christian missionaries, such as J. B. Wood, David Hinderer, Daniel Olubi, Samuel Johnson and Charles Phillips all played active roles in the settlement of the conflict. They appealed to the warriors on both camps for the cessation of the war. During the critical peace negotiation, both Johnson and Phillips played multifarious roles as private secretaries, roving diplomats, interpreters, translators advisers and even instructors. They played these roles creditably. As there were no typewriters in those days in Yorubaland, these gentlemen wrote in beautiful longhand and many sensitive issues were handled by both of them with great care and tact. The restoration of peace was very important in the religious, economic, political and social history of Yorubaland. The slaves who were kept by the Ibadan war- lords became free and returned to their various homes in Ekitiland and Ijesaland. Many of them had embraced Christianity in Ibadan, Lagos and Abeokuta. The cessation of war led to economic development in Yorubaland. There was a free flow of trade and commerce. It also led to the establishment of schools by the different missionary bodies.

It is pertinent to note that the establishment of schools was a major policy of the various missions in Yorubaland. It was a strategy adopted by the early missionaries to win converts from traditional and Islamic religions. This strategy was successfully adopted initially; however, there was a resistance later by the Muslims in some communities in Yorubaland. The method of conversion was adopted in the nooks and crannies of Ijesaland to win souls for Jesus Christ and to educate the new converts. In the 19th Century, as soon as a church was built in an Ijesa community, at least a primary school would be opened nearby to educate the children of the converts. In Ijesaland, the first primary school was founded by the Anglican Church and named St. John's Primary School, Iloro, Ilesa. The Methodist Mission established Methodist Primary School at Otapete; while the Roman Catholic followed suit with the establishment of St. Mary's Catholic Primary School, Ifofin, Ilesa (Omotoye, 2003). St. Saviours Anglican Primary school was also established in 1897. With the emergence of African Churches in the first decade of the 20th century, more schools were established in Yorubaland. For instance, African Grammar School, Ilesa. The African Independent Churches (Aladura) established the Cherubim and Seraphim Grammar School, Ilesa.

The efforts of the Christian Missionaries in the field of western medicine are highly appreciated, especially, at the end of the 19th century and beyond. The various Christian denominations made efforts to establish medical hospitals in order to cater for themselves and their converts. It was a strategy of conversion and to showcase their technological development in Ijesaland and Yorubaland in general. The medical healing efforts of Revd Adolphus Mann (C.M.S) and J. T Bowen, an American Baptist, can never be forgotten in Ijaye. They played prominent roles in safeguarding the lives of the people by providing them with adequate and necessary medicine when the Ibadan army, under the leadership of Ogunmola, sacked the town. Mann spent much of his time in providing medical care for the sick and the needy (Omotoye, 2003). The Roman Catholic Church established a hospital at Ilesa; while the Methodist built Wesley Guild Hospital at Ilesa; the Seventh Day Adventist Hospital at Ilesa; Sacred Heart Hospital was stationed also at Ilesa (Ayandele, 1966 & Agbaje, 1995).

Agriculture has been a predominant feature of the economy of Yorubaland from the earliest times. Agriculture played a significant role in the emergence of the Yoruba as builders of the oldest and largest urban settlements in the forest region of West Africa. Traditional agriculture in Yorubaland reached its peak in the 19th Century. Travelers and

missionaries like T. J. Bowen and W. H Clarke attested to this by the second half of the 19th Century. The demand for produce like palm kernel, rubber, cotton and cocoa by the European market accentuated this process. The Christian missionaries in the 19th Century brought about improvement in the economic fortunes of the Christians by introducing new cash crops such as, cocoa and cashew. T. Ajayi in his studies on Ijesa remarked saying: “if the church was to be independent and economically viable, there was a need for financial support from the local congregation” (Ajayi, 2010). Charles Phillips, the leader of the C.M.S. Church in Ilesa (1877-1906) encouraged the Christian farmers to engage in the planting of cocoa seedlings. Church organizations and individuals took up the challenge and it improved their economic viability and stability. It is interesting to note that the Western government of the late sage Chief Obafemi Awolowo benefited immensely from this initiative. This eventually led to the establishment of some cocoa plantation in Western Nigeria. However, there was a decline in the product because the subsequent government neglected cocoa production as a result of oil. In colonial Ijesaland, many church members were encouraged to organize cooperative societies, so as to enhance and improve the economic lives of their members. For example, there were three viable and functional cooperative societies at Saint Paul’s Anglican Church, Igboru Ijesa. The missionaries also demonstrated their level of scientific advancement in architecture. The mission houses at the end of the 19th Century were the most beautiful, and well ventilated with corrugated iron sheets. In Ilesa, Charles Phillips was the first to use corrugated iron sheets for the roofing of the church Chapel. “Phillips himself travelled to Lagos to purchase the iron sheets which were brought to Ilesa on the 23th August, 1892” (Ajayi, 2010). This was a sign of modernity and social improvement. Other Anglican churches and individuals within and outside the community strove to change their roofs from thatched leaves to corrugated iron sheets.

iii. Impact of Colonial Rule on Ijesaland

The origins of religion lie far back at the beginning of human society. African traditional religion helped men to live together, expressed their higher hopes and aspirations, and linked the individual to the community. Colonial rule effected some changes in the indigenous system of administration. The powers of the chiefs were relegated to the background, as their positions were usurped by the British administrative officers. As the British administration was ignorant of the local politics, their decisions did not augur well for cooperation, agreement and friendship between the various Ijesa communities. The Ijesas lost their sovereignty under colonial rule. They lost their freedom of choice as to what to change in their own culture and what to copy or reject in European culture. The right to self-direction which the people of Ijesa enjoyed before European conquest and rule were lost in the process as well.

As Christianity gained currency, the religious loyalty of the people shifted from the indigenous religion to the Christian religion. Beliefs and customs of the Ijesa people continued to reflect the social and spiritual development of the past. These customs and beliefs were however a vital and necessary part of everyday life in historical times. The churches became institutionalized. They offered avenues whereby men, who would by their age or other criteria be ineligible for traditional political officers, achieved prestigious positions in their communities. The government policies led to the emergence of anew elite. Power shifted from the elders to the new elites who were not custodians of the town’s histories and norms. Inter-group relations at this time suffered a mutation, as inter-families and inter-village strife made life irksome to an extent during the period under discussion. The penetration of alien institutions into pre-colonial societies was possible because the managers

of many institutions took advantage of the new opportunities to re-organise and to re-order the network of rights and obligations by bringing in new entities and thereby enhancing their own position vis-à-vis those of other institutions.

The establishment of colonial rule was phenomenal in Ijesaland. It was during this era that the British administrators made their impact felt in all facets of the administrative strata. During this period, the task of administration rested on the British administrators that stood at the helm of affairs. These British administrators had local agents that furnished them with information in which they based on in implementing their decisions. The chiefs, court messengers and clerks furnished the British administrators some useful information that influenced their decision making. Some of the information they got were biased and in trying to formulate policy decisions, it led to inter-community conflicts and tensions.

The colonial administration had introduced native courts in Ijesaland and the harsh, even dehumanizing punishments that were meted out to the people for crimes that were not explained to them, the dictum of the government which was inherited by the country at independence being that “ignorance of the law is no excuse for its infringement”. The Ijesa people found these criminal and civil codes strange. Other than the established taboos and laws, the rule of the game of existence was the survival of the fittest. For instance, if a man was stronger than another man who was known to be courting a girl who may even have been betrothed to the suitor, the stronger man could beat him up or disgrace him publicly by defeating him in a wrestling contest toward him off the girl. He then took over the girl. There was nothing wrong in seducing another man’s wife and taking her over if a man was stronger than the husband, but adultery was forbidden, particularly for women and incest was considered an abomination. Strong men went to towns to rob them of their cows, sheep, and other property. This was considered an act of bravery. It was a mark of cowardice, however, to do such things within one’s own town. One was compelled to make restitution if known to have stolen from within the town in addition to paying stipulated fines. If one stole from his relation, it was considered an abomination and the relevant sanctions would apply in addition to ritual propitiation. In particular, there were laws and taboos on inheritance, murder, stealing, and adultery among others.

It was not the mere fact that the above offences were considered criminal that the people did not like but because they had their ways of dealing with anti-social behaviours. The loss of personal liberty through long prison terms and even the additional brutalization by the colonial police did not go down well with the people. Moreover, the people were forced to organize themselves into duty groups to carry the British officials on hammocks.

The economic changes were in the fields of agriculture, transport, communication, technology or local industries. Unavailability of adequate farmlands prompted Ijesa farmers to look elsewhere within their neighbours territories to farm and this generated inter-community land disputes. To a greater extent, farming in Ijesaland was that of growing foodstuffs for home-consumption. It was colonial rule that emphasized on growing of economic crops for export. The colonial government intensified the production of cash crops which had in the past been neglected. It was during this period that good and efficient transport and communication system was established which made it easier for inter-community contact. The old pathways were gradually replaced by motorable roads and this vastly expanded the volume of internal trade. It was at this time that the Ijesa-Ilobu road was constructed. The immediate result of this new development was that it brought to an end the antiquated head portage system and made easy evacuation of agricultural goods possible. Roads and railways were constructed for two main reasons: to strengthen the government control over her subject peoples and to facilitate the export of her primary products. The good

communication system also ensured easy and quick distribution of imported goods to the interior.

Traditional societies developed some forms of industry. However, they tended to depend solely on human sources of power. These industries declined when they came into contact with imported European goods. This was because; European goods were made in large quantities using inanimate sources of power and were therefore on the average cheaper than the locally made one. It was at this time that inter-group reliance on local industries declined and imported goods undermined the development of traditional manufactures. By a deliberate policy of suppression, the Europeans retarded the progress of traditional production system. This affected inter-group unity and cooperation because the decline in local industries reduced inter-group reliance.

The cultivation of yams petered out as colonial rule progressed. It is not clear why this fate befell the leading species of the community's prime subsistence crop. Certain factors are however, discernible. Firstly, with the opening up of the community to external influences by the end of the 19th century, such perishable items gradually lost their appeal as indices of wealth and status. Secondly, the advent of missionary education denied this crop the attention of many youths who could have succeeded their fathers as cultivators. Thirdly, as prominent Ijesa men got drawn into the vortex of world trade, they paid less attention to yam cultivation while the rapidly expanding population menaced the existing stock. Finally, these yams seemed to have thrived best in the rich long-forested farmlands which characterized the pre-colonial era. The colonial rule hosted a fast expanding population which shortened fallow cycles, reduced soil fertility, further fragmented available plots and diminished yields.

Colonial rule in Ijesaland also brought about social changes. The first missionaries to build a church in Ilesa were the Church Missionary Society (C.M.S). They established a church at Ilesa. Those who were Christian converts came to on Sundays for worship. The members of this church looked upon themselves as one in union with Christ. After service, the members of different societies within the church exchanged visits. Missionary activities were viewed towards education, Christianizing fighting against attitude to people. The influence of the missionaries in Ijesaland was a very good phenomenon, and that it helped not only in maintaining law and order, but also influenced the life pattern with the result that almost Ijesa people were Christians belonging to one denomination or another. The missionaries stimulated inter-parish visits which brought about the coming together of members of the same denomination from the different Ijesa towns.

To be a Christian meant rejection of one's societal customs especially those connected with marriage and burial customs. Initiation ceremonies were discouraged and ancestor veneration was particularly subjected to condemnation. By attacking them, the missionaries weakened inter-community solidarity and this brought about social dislocation. This period witnessed the European culture and civilization and that of the African cultural values being at loggerheads. There was a departure from the much cherished African pre-colonial societal values. "Africans ceased to set indigenous cultural goals and standards, and lost full command of training young members of the society" (Rodney, 1972). Christianity brought about seperative tendencies between Christians and non-Christians. There was inter-denominational disagreement between the Roman Catholic Mission and the Church Missionary Society as they struggled for supremacy. Roman Catholic members were not allowed to marry non-members and these soured inter-group relations.

In the field of education, both the missionaries and the government had left their imprint on the sands of time. The St. John Catholic Church at Ilesa and the Saint Stephen's Anglican Church opened with primary schools attracted to them. The colonial government

built the government primary school in Ilesa. In these three primary schools, the children of Ilesa and the neighbouring towns came together to acquire the much cherished western education. The schools built served as a forum for cordial relations among the pupils from the various towns.

The type of education which was encouraged was that which provided interpreters to European administrative officers, teachers and catechists to the European missionaries. Through this, “colonialism created privileged elite, living in a way which was quite different from that of the impoverished villagers around them”. The colonialists in Africa occasionally paid lip service to women’s education and emancipation, but objectively there was deterioration in the status of women owing to colonial rule (Rodney, 1972). The European rule brought scientific methods of healing and preventing diseases through the establishment of the dispensaries and maternity homes, and the General Hospital at Ilesa which was built through self-help efforts in 1923. Reliance on traditional medicine diminished as people from the various towns in Ijesaland got orthodox medical attention.

CONCLUSION

The Ijesaland of Nigeria, as narrated by Peel was administered under one large district called Ijesa Council between 1900 and 1963 with the headquarters at Oke-Imo in Ilesa. In 1963, through the Republican Constitution, Ijesaland was decentralized into Ijesa South and Ijesa North divisions. The number of administration units in Ijesaland increased to three in 1976 through Local Government Reform Acts; these are Ilesha, Ijesa North and Atakunmosa Local Government Areas with the headquarters at Ilesha, Ijebujsa and Oshu, respectively.

Ijesa North Local Government Area was renamed Obokun Local Government Area in 1978 with the headquarters still at Ijebujsa. Aguda reports that the number of Local Government Areas in Ijesaland increased to eight in 1982, namely: Atakunmosa East, Atakunmosa West, Atakunmosa Central, Ilesa, Obokun North, Obokun South and Oriade Local Government Areas. However, these eight Local Government Areas did not exist for long as they were abrogated by the ‘new’ Federal Military Government, thus reverting to the old ones. The present six political divisions in Ijesaland were created in 1997. These are: Atakunmosa East, Atakunmosa West, Ilesa East, Ilesa West, Obokun and Oriade Local Government Areas with the headquarters at Iperindo, Osu, Iyemogun Road (in Ilesa), Ereja Square (also, in Ilesa), Ibokun, and Ijebujsa, in that order. Both Ilesa East and West Local Government Areas are located within Ilesa Township.

END NOTES

Egbe Alaslatu: The word Asalatu is coined from the word As-Salat ‘ala Nabiyy which means seeking the benediction of Allah upon the Prophet. Egbe Alaslatu therefore implies a group of people who came together for the purpose of invoking blessings upon the Prophet.

Egbe Binukonu: This literally means the people of like minds. It is the name of a group of people who decided to come together for socio-religious purposes.

Ijeshaland: Ijesaland is the collective name of a branch of the Yoruba people speaking Ijesa dialect

Ilesa: Ilesa was an important military centre in the campaigns against Ibadan in the 19th century Yoruba civil wars.

Mallams: It is coined from the Arabic word mucallim used for teachers and preachers of Islam in Yorubaland. The word originated from Hausa society who used to call their religious leaders the name.

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